

HPOG Promising Practices: Mentoring for CNA Students Schenectady County Community College

Schenectady County Community College (SCCC) has implemented a mentoring program for HPOG Certified Nurse Aide (CNA) students. The goal of this practice is to offer students an extra layer of support by delivering the practical skills training necessary to pass their certification exam and by providing role models to enhance students' ability to visualize themselves in the CNA role.

SCCC's HPOG program currently has three CNA mentors working on a contractual basis and rotating between training sites. These mentors are all licensed, experienced CNAs whose duties are to assist the Registered Nurses leading the simulation lab practice of clinical skills and to model the competencies and soft skills needed in the healthcare workplace. Mentors are also available for meeting with students outside of the classroom, where they can help students review class material, prepare for exams, or navigate the large amount of resources available from the HPOG program and its partners. Prior to the certification exam, mentors join students in the labs for "review days," ensuring that students are prepared for the test.

In addition to forming a bond with students, the mentors interact regularly with instructors and case managers. These relationships increase all parties' awareness of the students' barriers and progress and help program staff provide students with truly "wraparound" support.

HPOG project director Amy Goldfarb states that the most important factor in the success of Schenectady's mentor program is the personal qualities of the mentors themselves. They must be able to see themselves in the students and relate to the students' situations. Indeed, many of Schenectady's mentors come from backgrounds similar to those of the students, facilitating the process of forming mentor-student bonds. They also must have worked in the field and be able to communicate or make real their experience.

Goldfarb especially emphasizes the importance of the mentors' interpersonal skills and ability to inspire and believe in their students. Although many of these qualities are present in current or past HPOG students, Goldfarb cautions against hiring CNAs who have recently completed the program as the difficulties inherent in transitioning from student to mentor may prevent these new graduates from forming an appropriate and effective bond with the students.

Since its launch in late 2011, the CNA mentorship program has resulted in improved training program retention and completion rates, higher certification exam pass rates, and fewer students needing to retest for their certification.